**The Making of a Democrat Kingmaker** By ARTHUR J. PAIS 10/23/2000

Dinesh Sastry remembers meeting presidential candidate Michael Dukakis   
at a rally at Golden Gate Bridge twelve years ago—and deciding to work   
for him. “I wasn’t assigned to do it,” Sastry recalls. “I was a   
volunteer for the San Mateo County Democrats. My friend and I showed up   
and crossed these ‘please do not cross’ boundaries. The organizers   
thought we were sent in by the party and put us to work.”  “We went in   
and started coordinating the press corps. I was assigned to be the   
liaison with the Secret Service. [Hollywood stars] Ted Danson and Daryl   
Hannah were the two hosts, and [ABC correspondent] Sam Donaldson was   
there. They gave me a walkie-talkie. I was plugged in right in there,   
it was so exciting.  “I wrote about it in my Berkeley application, and   
everyone in my high school got a kick out of it. The organizers never   
figured it out. They just thanked us and gave us passes for another   
meeting.” There are many people including the current presidential   
candidate Al Gore who thank Sastry today.

At 29, Sastry has appeared as one of the savviest political operators in America. Sastry, who is   
pursuing a law degree at Georgetown University, already has a degree in   
engineering and computer science from University of California at   
Berkeley.  In recent months, Sastry, who honed his political skills   
during his college days campaigning for the rebel Democratic   
presidential candidate Jerry Brown, has emerged as one of the most   
respected of young Democrats. A board member of Democratic Leadership   
2000, he is also a superb fund-raiser. In the last three months, fund-   
raisers organized by him at the homes of Sabeer Bhatia and Dr. Anand   
Mahal in California have raised nearly $1.6 million. While Vice   
President Al Gore wined and dined at Bhatia’s home, Bill Clinton was   
the chief guest at latter’s. “I believe raising money also makes it   
easier to lobby for causes that are close to us here—and in India,”   
Sastry says. “When we raised about $1 million at Dr. Mahal’s home, we   
proved once for all that Indian Americans are serious fund- raisers. “Indians can be represented as much as they want to. Like Wall Street, they’ll take us because we’re good.”

Sastry recently spoke with thinkIndia.

**Q. What inspiration have you received from your father and   
grandfather?**

**A.** My Grandfather, D. V. Subba Rao, was an eminent   
criminal lawyer, legislator, and freedom fighter from Andhra Pradesh.   
He was instrumental in the creation of Andhra Pradesh from Madras   
state. He was a powerful orator, and mass leader, and always charted an   
independent course. He was dedicated to the upliftment of the poor, and   
people said he “roared like a lion” as he was fearless on the political   
stage or in court. He was an authority on Shakespeare and Milton and   
often incorporated their thoughts into his speeches and arguments. I   
think by hearing stories of his life, I’ve subconsciously become more   
appreciative of the struggles of the common man and the poor, and   
learned to be fearless. My interest in politics and law was born out of   
these stories. His life is fabled in the East Godavari region of Andhra   
Pradesh.  My father Durvasula Sastry is equally fearless and also a   
powerful orator. He is very independent but has founded and been in   
charge of more Indian American social, political, and cultural   
organizations than anyone in the country. His 40 years in the U.S.A.   
mirrors the development of the community. He is a devoted servant to   
the community, building lasting institutions and not seeking wealth or   
personal gain. I am much more ambitious and cautious about how things   
affect my well-being and future than he ever was. He is Gandhian in   
every sense, even spending his childhood spinning his own threads as   
part of the freedom struggle. He can’t eat mango now, because he is not   
used to the taste as he never tried it when he was young because he   
felt the cost was too high and that several people could be fed with   
the cost of a mango.

**Q. You are beholden to former Governor Jerry   
Brown. But Brown in recent years has turned against the establishment.   
And you raise funds from the Silicon Valley bigwigs.**

**A**. Jerry Brown put many of the early Silicon Valley bigwigs, such as the founders of   
Sun Microsystems, on important boards and commissions. The rest of   
America looked at the high tech world as dominated by eccentrics and   
weirdoes. He brought them (high-tech pioneers) into government and   
promoted tax breaks to companies with less than 300 employees in the   
1970s to spur innovations and the formation of startup companies. If   
corporations and entrepreneurs are driving our global economy and are   
capable of creating public opinion, investing capital, and creating   
vital jobs, then there is nothing wrong with courting them and letting   
them know in what ways they can help achieve a better society. Silicon   
Valley bigwigs tend to be more politically and culturally diverse and   
open minded than the rest of corporate America. You cannot put them in   
a box and write them off as the establishment. Many of them achieved   
wealth and power in unique and unorthodox ways, hence the diverse   
experiences that mould diverse opinions.  Brown always attacked the   
entrenched political system which is beholden to corporate greed and   
lobbyists of multinational companies who are beholden to international   
financial markets and the need to maximize profits and not loyal to any   
one community. He believes that government and the global economy must   
be organized in an efficient, elegant manner which is not tainted by   
selfish special interests but are more responsive. This would result in   
less inequity, less waste, more transparency and predictability and   
generally more opportunity. The chain is only as strong as the weakest   
link, and thus, I like the way Brown throws away conservative and   
liberal labels, and chooses ideas that lead to radical reform,   
progress, and efficiency.

**Q. Would be you be interested in running for   
public office?**

**A.** If I thought I could legitimately win and if elected,   
and could maximize my contribution to society, considering the skills I   
possess, the opportunities I have, and the situation I’m in at the time   
… I think I would prefer an open seat and a winnable seat. But perhaps   
it would be more fun using the contacts I have, the experience I have   
accumulated to work with others in promoting the candidacies of five or   
six people throughout America. Perhaps the Democratic Party could help   
nurture the early careers of several promising Indian Americans around

the country already involved in local politics of their area. I would   
have to see what would be more fulfilling.